

SOUTH FLORIDA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION TASK FORCE
Office of the Executive Director

May 4, 2004

John Paul Woodley, Jr.
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
108 Army Pentagon, Room 3E446
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Mr. Woodley:

I am writing to convey the unanimous support of the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force for the expeditious completion of the Corps of Engineers' Indian River Lagoon-South (IRL) Project Implementation Report (PIR). As you know the intergovernmental South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force was established by Congress in the Water Resources Development Act of 1996 and the membership includes representatives from the key local, Tribal, State and Federal entities who are collaborating on the implementation of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), as well as other projects intended to restore the Everglades.

The Task Force strongly believes that implementing CERP in a manner that ensures achievement of natural system restoration goals, while also providing for the other water related needs of the region is essential to restoring the South Florida ecosystem. Because of the importance of implementing CERP, we believe that it is critical to maintain the momentum that began in December 2000 when Congress authorized the initial CERP projects. As a result, we support the expeditious completion of the public process for the IRL project.

The project recommends corrective actions intended to provide a more natural annual freshwater flow, while maintaining the current level of flood protection and freshwater supplies for the Indian River region. The project is anticipated to reduce the amount of water going to tide by providing both natural and reservoir storage. That storage will improve water quality; provide water to enhance the natural sheet flow to the remaining Everglades; and provide water for agricultural and other uses. The project will also improve the water quality in Lake Okeechobee and increase wetlands to provide habitat for native species, including many that are endangered.

The plan represents the necessary first step for the recovery of the natural resources of the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon, which have been damaged by unnatural releases and excessive volumes of stormwater from Lake Okeechobee that have been released to tide. In addition to the natural system benefits, the plan also provides significant benefits for agricultural and economic interests, both of which support the project.

c/o Florida International University - OE Building, Room 148 - University Park Campus
Miami, Florida 33199
Phone: 305-348-1665 - Fax: 305-348-1667

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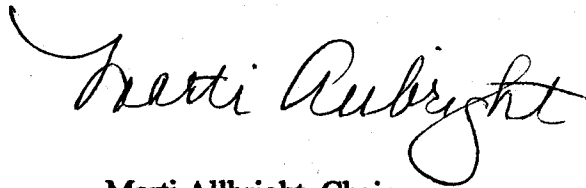
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As noted above, this plan has an unprecedented level of support from all stakeholder groups, including area businesses, agricultural interests, local civic organizations, local governmental bodies, environmental groups, and, of course, the State of Florida. A letter to Florida's Congressional Delegation from Ms. Colleen Castille, Secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, strongly supporting Congressional authorization for IRL this year is enclosed.

Local governments are doing their part as well and Martin County has provided significant financial resources to implement this project. To date, the County has raised over fifty (50) million dollars from Martin County citizens to purchase the necessary lands upon which the project features will be built.

The Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District are to be commended for shepherding this project through the detailed planning stage. We respectfully urge your support to promptly complete the public process for the IRL project. The Task Force stands ready to assist you in any way that we can and we appreciate the Administration's support for our Everglades restoration efforts.

Sincerely,



Marti Allbright, Chair
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration
Task Force

Enclosure



Jeb Bush
Governor

Department of Environmental Protection

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Building
3900 Commonwealth Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3000

Colleen M. Castille
Secretary

April 7, 2004

Florida Congressional Delegation
Washington, D.C.

Dear Congressional Member:

I write today to inform you of my support and endorsement of the Indian River Lagoon - South Project (IRL-South Project), and its inclusion in the Water Resources Development Act of 2004.

The Indian River Lagoon is recognized as an estuary of national significance and is a Florida Aquatic Preserve and an Outstanding Florida Water. Recently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and South Florida Water Management District completed a thorough scientific evaluation and developed a comprehensive plan to restore this critical part of the South Florida ecosystem. When complete, the project will restore more than 53,000 acres of wetlands, reduce pollution, and provide water storage to return a natural flow of fresh water to the St. Lucie and Indian River estuaries.

I am pleased to report that the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has approved this joint plan to protect the Indian River Lagoon as required under State law. However, the IRL-South Project requires federal approval by the U.S. Congress before restoration can begin. The State of Florida, along with our Federal partners, is dedicated to these efforts, and is committed to providing \$200 million annually through 2010 to fulfill its part of restoring the Everglades.

The Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan is a broad solution for ecosystem restoration, water supply, and flood control. Florida has forged a complete and equal partnership with the federal government to protect our national interests by restoring America's Everglades. The next step in this long-term partnership is implementation of the Indian River Lagoon - South Project. I urge your support on this matter.

Sincerely,

Colleen M. Castille
Secretary

"More Protection, Less Process"

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